



THE FEDERAL MARINER

MSC * NOAA * ARMY COE * MARAD

Volume 13 • ISSUE 1
January-March 2022



OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE SEAFARERS INTERNATIONAL UNION'S GOVERNMENT SERVICES DIVISION

Report Calls for Boosts to Organized Labor *Pro-Union Update from White House Includes 70 Recommendations*

The Biden Administration more than once has declared that it fully intends to be the most union- and worker-friendly executive branch in history. Its latest action towards achieving that objective came Feb. 7 when the White House released a report prepared by its Task Force on Worker Organizing and Empowerment.

A 43-page document, the report is the result of a series of task force meetings that were conducted to gather information and ideas for possible executive actions and statements. The group is chaired by Vice President Kamala Harris and vice-chaired by Secretary of Labor Marty Walsh, a longtime trade union member and leader.

The task force was created in April 2021 when President Biden – operating under the conviction that increasing worker organizing and empowerment is critical to growing the middle class, building an economy that puts workers first, and strengthening our democracy – issued Executive Order 14025. Its focus is to “assess the available tools and determine how to employ them to remove barriers to worker organizing and collective bargaining.”

The report offers 70 recommendations that would “position the federal government as a model actor; use the federal government’s authority to support worker empowerment by providing information, improving transparency, and making sure existing pro-worker services are delivered in a timely and helpful manner; [and] use longstanding authority to leverage the federal government’s purchasing and spending power to support workers who are organizing and pro-worker employers.”

The report said, “The recommendations were developed in collaboration with the over 20 executive agencies, departments and White House offices that are members of the task force. This work has been guided, too, by workers’ voices, many of whom the Vice President and Secretary of Labor met in their travels across the country.”

Among the recommendations that could impact maritime unions is the elimination of barriers so organizers may talk with federal employees and private-sector workers of federal contractors on federal property about the benefits of joining a union. It also listed recommendations pertaining to four federal agencies, including the Defense Department, which would help ensure federal contract dollars are not spent on anti-union campaigns and that anti-union campaign activities by federal contractors are publicly disclosed.

In addition, the Military2Maritime program for men and women who are leaving the armed services to become merchant mariners would benefit from a stated recommendation to “work with the Union Veterans Council to help service members, military spouses, and veterans transition into good union jobs.” (The SIU is affiliated with the council via the Maritime Trades Department.)

“The Biden-Harris Administration delivered another victory for working people today with the release of the first report,” stated AFL-CIO President Liz Shuler. “This unprecedented report recognizes the critical role that unions play in creating a fairer economy. By taking steps to give more workers the right to organize and bargain collectively, the administration is once again

demonstrating that it is committed to using its power to support unions.”

The AFL-CIO noted the report calls for:

- Ensuring workers know organizing and bargaining rights;
- Establishing a resource center on unions and collective bargaining;
- Protecting workers who organize from illegal retaliation;
- Exposing employers’ use of anti-union consultants;
- Addressing equity across underserved communities; and
- Sharing the positive impact unions have on all workers and the U.S. economy.

Shuler said the AFL-CIO is “committed to working with the administration to implement these recommendations.” But she also called upon Congress “to pass both the Protecting the Right to Organize (PRO) Act and the Public Service Freedom to Negotiate Act, which will ensure that every worker who wants to join a union may freely do so.”

The report noted that Biden often points out “unions built the middle class and lift up workers, both union and nonunion.” Given this position, the administration – at its core – believes that unions benefit everyone, according to the report, which also reminds readers that unions have fought for and helped win many aspects of American’s work lives perhaps taken for granted today, like the 40-hour work week and the weekend, as well as landmark programs like Medicare.

According to the report, unions continue their fight for higher wages, greater job security, safety and health protections, health insurance and retirement plans, and protections from

discrimination and harassment for all workers. Researchers have found that today’s union households earn up to 20% more than non-union households, with an even greater union advantage for workers with less formal education and workers of color.

Research has also shown that growing economic inequality, growing pay gaps for women and workers of color, and declining voice in our democracy for working class Americans are all caused, in part, by the declining percentage of workers represented by unions.

The National Labor Relations Act, enacted in 1935, noted that it is the policy of the United States to encourage the practice and procedure of collective bargaining, and to protect the exercise, by workers, of their full freedom of association. Unfortunately, according to the task force report, the federal government has not always done its part to turn this policy into action. In fact, in some cases government has actively undermined worker organizing, unions, and collective bargaining.

While some past administrations have taken individual actions to empower workers and strengthen their rights, the report stated that the Biden-Harris administration will be the first to take a comprehensive approach to doing so with the existing authority of the executive branch. The administration’s goal is not just to facilitate worker power through executive action; it is to model practices that can be followed by state and local governments, private sector employers and others.

Biden has directed the task force to continue its work, provide an update on actions taken, and offer further recommendations in six months.

Gen. Van Ovost Praises U.S. Merchant Mariners

The commanding officer of the U.S. Transportation Command (TRANSCOM) recently voiced her strong backing of the U.S. Merchant Marine and the laws and programs that keep it afloat.

Gen. Jacqueline D. Van Ovost (USAF) addressed more than 600 attendees Dec. 3 in New York during the annual Admiral of the Ocean Sea event, sponsored by the United Seamen’s Service. The audience included maritime labor leaders (many from the SIU), industry executives, other military officers, international maritime officials and others (see story, page 3).

Gen. Van Ovost was the first speaker. She said, “The Department of Defense relies on you to deliver our decisive military force – a job you have done for decades. This industry is critical to advancing American interests. As a seafaring nation, our country has been, and is, and will continue to be reliant on the strength of the maritime industry and the many mariners who are known for

their determination, their grit and selfless service. You are true patriots.”

She pointed out that mariners “are the first to go and the last to return” during major conflicts, and added that their role isn’t limited to those periods. “You are America’s economic lifeline during peacetime,” she stated. “I’ve referred to you as TRANSCOM’s fourth component.”

Gen. Van Ovost touched on current challenges facing both the armed services and the maritime industry. She emphasized the partnership between the public and private sectors, their shared goals, and the value of regular sealift exercises. She also underscored the importance of “minimizing our reliance on foreign entities”

She referred to a relatively recent study that led to the creation of the new U.S. Tanker Security Program and added, “Programs such as the Tanker Security Program, the Maritime Security Program

and the Jones Act ensure that we have reliable access to industry capabilities to meet our needs.”

The general then recalled a quote from retired Gen. Henry Hugh Shelton, former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who said: “Our national security depends on a vital merchant marine foundation.”

Gen. Van Ovost concluded, “I could not be more proud of the relationship between TRANSCOM and the maritime industry. We value the U.S. mariners operating U.S. vessels, and we recognize the important role our mariners play in the strength of our nation.”

TRANSCOM is headquartered at Scott Air Force Base, Illinois. Its component commands include the U.S. Military Sealift Command.

SIU Secretary-Treasurer David Heindel was one of the main honorees at the awards dinner, and the union had a strong turnout that included SIU



Gen. Van Ovost describes U.S. mariners as “true patriots.”

President Michael Sacco, Executive Vice President Augie Tellez, Vice Presidents Dean Corgey, Tom Orzechowski, Joseph Soresi, Nick Marrone and Nicholas Celona and many other officials.

President's Column

Fourth Arm of Defense

At press time, much of the world seemed on edge due to a potential invasion of Ukraine by Russia.



Michael Sacco

While it goes without saying that the hope here is for a diplomatic solution, our job in the SIU is to always be ready to support our troops. The current situation involving Russia is a reminder of one reason why we need a U.S. Merchant Marine and why the SIU constantly advocates for the laws and programs that help maintain American crews and American sealift capacity.

If and when the balloon goes up (not just in this current circumstance), it's always a moment of truth for American maritime's centuries-old role as our fourth arm of defense. In those instances, while there never has been and never will be any hesitation by our mariners to answer the call, we've got to have the personnel and the ships in the first place.

This is why, when the SIU advocates for the Jones Act, cargo preference laws, the Maritime Security Program, domestic shipbuilding, and newer tools such as the Tanker Security Program and Cable Security Fleet, we're really pushing to boost national, economic and homeland security. It's no secret that our industry, like many others, faces a manpower shortage. High-ranking military officials have openly stated as much in recent years. One way to alleviate that deficiency and bring more people into the industry is by maintaining, growing or establishing policies and programs that back the U.S. Merchant Marine.

For anyone new to maritime, you may not know that in times of crisis, most U.S. military cargoes are carried by civilian-crewed ships. During Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom, for example, the U.S. Merchant Marine transported more than 90 percent of the materiel supporting our troops. This has been the case in virtually every conflict since our nation's founding, most prominently during World War II.

There's simply no debate about the vital importance, time-tested reliability, and ongoing need for a strong U.S. maritime industry. Collectively, we as a nation must continue taking steps to support and revitalize it.

An Ill-Conceived Proposal

The men and women who serve aboard U.S.-flag merchant vessels answer the call not just during mobilizations for national defense but also when aid is needed for victims of natural disasters, as seen in recent years when hurricanes and earthquakes rocked Puerto Rico.

American merchant mariners are the gold standard for the world in terms of safety and training. And they always deliver – from iron ore for steel mills along the Great Lakes to food aid to hungry citizens in Africa, and from materiel for American armed forces stationed around the world to vital household goods at domestic ports.

For generations, foreign interests and their allies have tried to find ways to circumvent U.S. labor and tax laws to take good jobs away from hard-working Americans. The latest effort, announced last month, calls for the creation of a so-called open registry for the U.S. Virgin Islands (USVI). As outlined, this initiative would take away cargo from U.S.-flag vessels, crewed by American citizens, and place it on ships that do not use American crews, do not pay American taxes and do not meet American safety and labor standards.

This attempt to create a flag of convenience using the USVI is wrong and harmful to American workers.

The SIU has joined with allies from throughout maritime labor in calling upon the Biden Administration, the Congress, the Department of Defense and the Maritime Administration to reject any effort that USVI-flag vessels be treated as if they are the same as U.S.-flag, U.S.-crewed ships for any purpose or for any program. At the same time, we reiterate our commitment to work with the Biden Administration and the Congress to achieve a more robust, commercially viable U.S.-flag, U.S.-crewed fleet that will continue to protect America's economic, military and homeland security.

SIU Directory

Michael Sacco, *President*

Augustin Tellez, *Executive Vice President*

David Heindel, *Secretary-Treasurer*

George Tricker, *Vice President Contracts*

Nicholas Celona,
Vice President Government Services

Joe Vincenzo,
Asst. Vice President Government Services

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SIU CIVMARS Help Rescue 2 in Gulf of Oman

CIVMARS from the SIU Government Services Division helped rescue two fishermen who'd been stuck at sea for more than a week.

On Nov. 27, the *USNS Charles Drew* was involved in a rescue in the Gulf of Oman. The dry cargo ship received word of a distress call at 10 a.m. local time from Combined Maritime Forces, an international maritime coalition headquartered in Bahrain. The *Charles Drew* proceeded to the site of a stranded fishing vessel, and provided food, water and medical care to the two occupants

– who had been adrift at sea for eight days. The men from the disabled craft were then transported to an Omani coast guard vessel.

"This is what we are trained and ready to do," said Vice Adm. Brad Cooper, commander of U.S. Naval Forces Central Command, U.S. 5th Fleet and Combined Maritime Forces. "As professional mariners, we have a responsibility to help people in need at sea. We appreciate the government of Oman for its assistance and support in helping us return the mariners home."



Two Iranian fishermen signal for assistance Nov. 27 after their boat had been adrift for eight days in the Gulf of Oman. (U.S. Navy photo)

BLS Releases Annual Report on U.S. Union Membership

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) has released its annual report on union membership, but the findings may not tell the whole story, according to some who reviewed it.

Overall membership dropped in 2021 by approximately 241,000, meaning that around 14 million people belonged to unions. The report also found that union members, on average, earn \$10,000 more per year than their unrepresented counterparts.

The AFL-CIO, to which the SIU is affiliated, looked beyond the raw data.

"The BLS annual report on union membership makes it clear that American labor laws are unquestionably broken," the federation said in a written statement. "While the report indicates a 0.5% drop in union membership from 2020–2021, the data is not representative of the greater union trends taking place across the country. These statistics highlight the urgent need for the passage of the Protecting the Right to Organize (PRO) Act and the Public Service Freedom to Negotiate Act."

"In 2021, workers forcefully rejected low-wage, thankless jobs after a year of being called essential," said AFL-CIO President Liz Shuler. "In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is clearer now than ever that our labor laws are designed to make joining a union as difficult as possible. Across this country, workers are organizing for a voice on the job and millions of Americans are standing in solidarity with union members on strike. If everyone who wanted to join a union was able to do so, membership would skyrocket. The PRO Act and the Public Service Freedom to Negotiate Act are how we get there."

The Economic Policy Institute (EPI), a nonprofit, nonpartisan think tank created in 1986 to include the needs of low- and middle-income workers in economic policy discussions, also released their analysis of the data. The organization noted, "To understand what happened to unionization in 2021, it is crucial to recall what happened in 2020. In 2020, the number of union workers declined substantially as the pandemic caused massive job loss for both union and nonunion workers. However, unionization rates – the share of the workforce that is unionized – increased substantially because union workers lost fewer jobs during the first year of the pandemic than nonunion workers did. The lower job loss among the unionized workforce was due in no small part to a 'pandemic composition' effect – the fact that the industries that

got hit hardest by the pandemic (such as leisure and hospitality) are less likely to be unionized than industries that were more sheltered from the pandemic, and this change in the composition of the workforce raised unionization rates mechanically. Put another way, jobs in less unionized industries were lost at a higher rate, so unionization rates went up."

The EPI continued, "In 2021, that dynamic happened in reverse as jobs were added in the recovery. The 'trampoline' effect – the fact that the jobs that come back in a recovery tend to look pretty much like the jobs that were lost – means that the jobs that came back in 2021 were concentrated in industries (such as leisure and hospitality) that have low unionization rates. This contributed to the substantial decline in the unionization rate in 2021, undoing the 2020 increase."

In a similar vein as the AFL-CIO's comments, the EPI also pointed out, "The share of workers who do not but would like to have a union at their workplace is far higher than the share who had union representation in 2021 (11.6%). While more recent data are unavailable, an analysis of 2017 survey data showed almost half of nonunion workers polled (48%) said they would vote to create a union in their workplace tomorrow if they could. That figure is up substantially from about one-third (32–33%) of nonunion, nonmanagerial workers asked similar questions in 1977 and 1995."

According to the BLS report, in 2021, the union membership rate was 10.3 percent (the same in 2019). The rate is down from 10.8 percent in 2020.

In addition, nonunion workers had median weekly earnings that were 83 percent of earnings for workers who were union members (\$975 versus \$1,169), and the union membership rate of public-sector workers (33.9 percent) continued to be more than five times higher than the rate of private-sector workers (6.1 percent).

The AFL-CIO concluded by saying, "The BLS report also shows promising data for communities of color. Black workers continued to have the highest unionization rate in 2021, with 12.9% membership.... Black union workers are paid 13.7% more than their nonunionized peers. According to a 2021 Gallup poll, union approval is at its highest level in over 50 years, with 68% of Americans supporting organized labor, including 77% of young people. An MIT study found that 60 million Americans would join a labor union if they could, underscoring the need for changes to labor laws."

How to Become an SIU Member

Joining the SIU is easy and an important step in protecting your workplace rights. The union's website – www.seafarers.org – includes printable PDF versions of forms that mariners may use to request and authorize payroll deductions for labor organization dues. The forms are posted at:

<https://www.seafarers.org/news/labor-maritime-news/civmar-news/>

Forms are also available under "SIU Forms" in the ABOUT tab.

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Oakland Thanksgiving Event Resumes

Locally Renowned Gathering Features Congressional Remarks

Some of the details were different, for precautionary reasons – but the enthusiastic fellowship and great food were familiar to those attending the annual pre-Thanksgiving feast at the hiring hall in Oakland, California.

The popular gathering skipped 2020 for safety reasons, but returned on Nov. 23, 2021 (in its usual slot, which is the Tuesday of Thanksgiving week).

Guest speakers included U.S. Reps. Barbara Lee, John Garamendi, Jerry McNerney and Jim Panetta (all California Democrats). Other guests included military personnel; maritime union members, pensioners and officials; numerous building-trades union personnel; shipping company executives and staff; and others.

SIU Vice President Government Services Nicholas Celona, long the driving force behind the decades-old yearly event, said the mood was upbeat for the 2021 feast.

“We took many precautions, including serving the meals in individual containers instead of going with the usual buffet-style arrangement,” Celona said. “We made sure plenty of hand sanitizer was available and we asked that everyone bring their vaccination cards. We also spaced out the tables more than usual. People said they were glad to be back.”

With 120 people in attendance, the congressional representatives gave brief remarks mainly focusing on the holiday season, the infrastructure bill, and the importance of creating and maintaining good jobs in the U.S. They also emphasized the country’s ongoing need for American mariners and U.S.-flag ships.



Pictured from left left are U.S. Rep. Jerry McNerney (D-California), SIU VP Nick Marrone, U.S. Rep. John Garamendi (D-California), SIU VP Nicholas Celona and U.S. Rep. Jim Panetta (D-California). In photo above, U.S. Rep. Barbara Lee (D-California) addresses the crowd.

SIU’s Heindel Honored with AOTOS Award

On a night when much of the spotlight focused on him, SIU Secretary-Treasurer David Heindel mainly wanted to talk about others.

Heindel on Dec. 3 received the Admiral of the Ocean Sea (AOTOS) Award in New York, a prestigious honor presented each year by the United Seamen’s Service (USS). This year’s honorees also included Bill Woodhour, president and CEO of Maersk Line, Limited (MLL); Kathy Metcalf, president and CEO of the Chamber of Shipping of America; and longtime labor relations icon Tony Naccarato, who garnered what is dubbed a Special AOTOS Award.

Three Seafarers-crewed vessels also were recognized with USS Mariners’ Plaques: the *USNS Patuxent*, *American Pride*, and *Horizon Reliance*. The plaques, bestowed for various acts of heroism at sea, were presented by Rear Adm. Michael Wettlaufer, USN, commander of the U.S. Military Sealift Command.

Prior to those presentations, Gen. Jacqueline D. Van Ovest, USAF, commander of the U.S. Transportation Command, addressed the audience of more than 600, including SIU President Michael Sacco, Executive Vice President Augie Tellez and others (see front page).

Heindel called his award “the honor of a lifetime,” and he thanked many people for supporting his work throughout the years, including his family, Sacco, other SIU officials, and colleagues from the International Transport Workers’ Federation (ITF), several of whom travelled to the awards dinner from overseas. (Heindel chairs the ITF Seafarers’ Section.)

He emphasized that throughout his decades as a union official, following several years as a rank-and-file mariner, his aim remained constant.

“Whether we’re talking about the crew-change crisis that has consumed our many hours on Zoom or the latest issue with the supply chain, shipboard automation, alternative fuels, training requirements or almost any other maritime-related topic, my focus ultimately is on the wellbeing of the individual seafarer,” Heindel said. “That’s what motivates me, and on the rare occasions I look back, it’s what I’m most proud of.”

Reflecting on his time with the union, Heindel recalled, “I joined the SIU in the early 1970s, and one rea-



SIU Secretary-Treasurer David Heindel, speaking at the AOTOS event, reiterates his commitment to the wellbeing of mariners.

son I’ve always believed in the union is that we don’t stand still. We constantly strive to make improvements, and the results speak for themselves. Today, our members have free access to world-class vocational training at our affiliated school in Piney Point, Maryland. They’re part of a top-of-the-line, fully funded pension plan that gives them security when they look ahead to retirement. They’re covered by excellent medical benefits, and they’re protected by great contracts – which means their families are protected, too.

“Another way we’ve helped our rank-and-file members is by keeping up with the times regarding recordkeeping, getting them easy access to their individual shipping and registration information, and being able to communicate quickly using multiple outlets, regardless of whether they’re at sea or ashore,” he continued. “That’s been a main focus throughout my tenure as the SIU’s secretary-treasurer, and while – like so many other things – the work is always ongoing, and we’ve made extraordinary progress over the years.”



SIU VP Government Services Nicholas Celona (left) and Bosun James Terry from the *USNS Patuxent* are pictured in New York.

He also credited the USS and ITF and cited examples of their recent accomplishments.

Metcalf and Naccarato both applauded the industry for its collectively cooperative nature, while also sharing insights about their respective backgrounds.

Woodhour, unable to attend because of a medical procedure, delivered his remarks via recorded video. He stressed the critical importance of the U.S. maritime industry and listed potential steps to expand it.

With CIVMARS Aboard USNS Guadalupe

While it’s not necessary to show support for the *Federal Mariner* in order to have one’s photo published, such actions cannot hurt. This snapshot, taken by shipboard delegate Sharon Hill aboard the *USNS Guadalupe* on the West Coast, includes three fellow CIVMARS and SIU Government Services Division Representative Jesse Ruth (second from left). (A complete archive of the newsletter is available online at seafarers.org, in the NEWS section.)



'Blown Away by SIU's Generosity'

Annual Outreach Benefits U.S. Military Families

The COVID-19 pandemic surely has induced innumerable "bah, humbug!" moments, but nothing has diminished the SIU's enthusiastic backing of an annual philanthropic project benefiting U.S. military families at Christmastime.

The yearly outreach known as Santa's Castle has become a staple for Tacoma, Washington-area Seafarers, who've backed it for more than a dozen years. Santa's Castle generates donations of toys and other gifts to U.S. military families (mainly E-4 and below) from Joint Base Lewis-McChord (JBLM), Washington, and from other bases.

For 2021, the SIU stepped up with donations worth approximately \$8,000. Most of the contributions came from rank-and-file members, but many others chipped in, including members of the union's executive board, pensioners, and officials from SIU-contracted Crowley Maritime and TOTE Services, respectively.

The union also hosted a luncheon on Dec. 23 for Santa's Castle representatives, SIU members, retirees and family members, and other guests. (The luncheon typically coincides with loading donations into trucks and vans, but that gathering was skipped in 2020, for precautionary reasons.)

"This was yet another good year for Tacoma Seafarers who turned out again to support the troops at JBLM with a considerable donation," said SIU Assistant Vice President Joe Vincenzo. "It's a way that we extend heartfelt thanks to the troops for their dedication and professionalism in service to our country."

While no service members attended the luncheon (an almost unprecedented rarity, likely caused by pandemic-related precautions at the base), Vincenzo, a U.S. Army veteran, added that Seafarers "turned out by the dozens to break bread together in a true spirit of giving, along with Santa's Castle volunteers and other special guests from the Inland Boatmen's Union and the Transportation Institute."

Santa's Castle President Donna Handoe stated, "We couldn't complete

our mission if the Seafarers didn't adopt us and treat us so nicely each and every year. Their dedication to our program really gets us going and keeps us afloat. We're always blown away by the SIU's generosity." (Santa's Castle is a private, non-profit organization.)

Handoe said that pandemic-related difficulties are ongoing when it comes to collecting and distributing donations, but Santa's Castle 2021 nevertheless proved successful.

"We were severely challenged in our 2020 season and in our 2021 season," she explained. "In 2020, everything was shut down. We weren't able to have people enter our building, so we did curbside pickup that year. We made it through on our leftovers and a few new donations. We then started 2021 in a deficit and struggled throughout the year, but we made it. There's always Christmas magic, again thanks to organizations like the Seafarers."

Anita Vargo, vice president of purchasing at Santa's Castle, also appreciated steps towards normalcy for the program in 2021 compared to 2020, even if at times they were more like lurches.

"In 2020, we were so slumped," Vargo said. "Our shelves were empty. It had been a long time since we had to help more than 2,000 families, and that took our inventory from 100 percent to five. This past year wasn't as bad, and with the Seafarers and others, they helped us so much to get our shelves restocked. By the grace of God, it all came together, like always."

Vargo said it appeared as if donations rebounded in part because "everyone made up for the year they couldn't give. It's amazing how the community came together and it was great to see the SIU for the luncheon. We missed having it last year."

She concluded, "I thank the SIU so much for always taking care of us. They're like clockwork, Joe and the rest. They're always amazing. We love it."

The feeling seems mutual.

Recertified Bosun **Rufino Giray** has donated items for the past few years and is "happy to help out the kids while



Recertified Bosun Dana Cella (left) donates bikes at the Tacoma hall, a collection point. SIU Asst. VP Joe Vincenzo, who spearheads the union's outreach, is at right.

showing appreciation for their parents' service," he said. "It feels good to do something for kids at Christmas. Also, from working on a ship, I understand being apart from your family at times. This is a way to brighten their day."

Recertified Bosun **Sanjay Gupta** started sailing with the SIU in 1991. He said participation in projects like Santa's Castle "is just part of us. Whenever I get a chance, I donate. I'm happy to help. It helps military families so they can enjoy Christmas."

Vincenzo emphasized that he doesn't take the members' participation for granted, even though they've supported

Santa's Castle and other local winter-holiday outreach dating to at least 2007. Along the way, Seafarers have generated more than \$100,000 worth of gifts.

"Getting there is never easy but for the generous individual contributions from members and other supporters," he said. "We the staff are truly grateful and humbled by the level of participation and generosity that Seafarers show year after year without fail, pandemic or no. I like to think that this is our way of pushing back with all due precaution and reasserting ourselves after almost two very challenging years."

Union Leaders Hail Biden's Pro-PLA Exec. Order

Union officials applauded President Joe Biden's Feb. 7 executive order mandating that federally funded construction projects worth at least \$35 million must be built by workers using project labor agreements (PLA).

"Just remember, it ain't labor – it's unions" that built the country and will do so again, Biden declared to a union crowd at the Ironworkers Local 5 hall in Upper Marlboro, Maryland, not far from SIU headquarters.

Sean McGarvey, president of North America's Building Trades Unions (a labor federation), spoke for others – including Local 5 members at Biden's signing ceremony – in declaring how the president's order would improve workers' wages, working conditions and health and safety.

"Project labor agreements are often effective in preventing problems from developing" on construction sites "because they provide structure and stability to large-scale construction projects," Biden's order explains.

That's "welcome news for all workers, union and nonunion," McGarvey pointed out. "Project labor agreements address labor supply, secure workers' classification, set good wages, promote strong health and safety standards, and ensure large-scale projects are completed on

time, with the highest degree of quality, efficiency, and safety."

AFL-CIO President Liz Shuler, an Electrical Worker, added in an e-mail: "President Biden's signing of an executive order requiring project labor agreements for all federal construction projects over \$35 million ensures the \$262 billion in federal construction contracting will use high-skilled union labor, create a more efficient approach to the work and will use our tax dollars to create high-quality jobs. Thanks to this agreement, 200,000 union members will make sure America's infrastructure is built."

McGarvey added PLAs not only create well-paying jobs for construction workers, but promote local hiring, increase well-trained (union-trained) apprentices and can let "women, people of color and veterans access construction career pathways. As a result, these agreements are proven to boost local economies, address inequities and uplift marginalized communities, and achieve substantial, direct cost savings by standardizing contract terms among various crafts."

Biden's order stressed the benefits of PLAs. They "avoid disruptions on projects by using dispute-resolution processes to resolve worksite disputes and by prohibiting work stoppages, including strikes and lockouts. They secure commitment of

all stakeholders on a construction site the project will proceed efficiently without unnecessary interruptions."

In return for higher wages and guaranteed due process on the job, workers and contractors get stability and quality work that lasts, the president said at the ceremony.

"I tell you who built America: the middle class," he explained. "And the people who built the middle class are organized labor: unions. Unions did it. That's not hyperbole. That's a fact. That's a straight fact."

Biden said his order will "help ensure we build a better America, we build it right, and we build it on time.... The executive order is making sure federal construction projects get completed on time and under budget, saving taxpayers money, clearing construction zones quickly, and ensuring everything the federal government signs to contract to build is built to last."

Biden's order covers not just work on roads, bridges, subways and airports, but all types of infrastructure. He specifically singled out improving U.S. ports and waterways.

Such maritime improvements, in the "hard" infrastructure law Biden signed in December, include at least two which PLAs would cover, according to a recent

statement from the AFL-CIO Maritime Trades Department: a new larger Soo Lock between Lake Superior and the other Great Lakes, costing \$470 million, and \$69 million "to improve navigation and expand capacity" at the Norfolk, Virginia, harbor, where container traffic has risen 67% in 10 years.

Biden's order has some limited exceptions, but even when agencies want to invoke them to avoid PLAs, a "senior official" must sign off on that decision, and justify the exception.

The allowances include projects of short duration, that use only one construction craft, that are "of compelling urgency that ... makes a project labor agreement impractical" or those where a PLA requirement would "substantially reduce the number of potential bidders so as to frustrate full and open competition."

Numerous studies have pointed out the benefits of PLAs, disclosing how those projects come in on time and often under budget. That hasn't stopped anti-worker organizations from trying to outlaw them.

PLAs "standardize working conditions across a project and ensure that all working people receive fair wages, benefits, and safe working conditions," said Painters President Jimmy Williams Jr.